



Graywolf

Canis lupus

STATUS

Endangered (43 FR 9612, March 9, 1978)

In Idaho, wolves north of Interstate 90 are listed as an endangered species. Wolves south of Interstate 90 in Idaho are listed as an experimental, nonessential population. (59 FR 60264; November 22, 1994 and 59 FR 60279; November 22, 1994)

DESCRIPTION

The gray wolf, nearly twice the size of a coyote, stands 26"-34" tall, and may weigh between 70-120 pounds. The wolf's size is remarkable — an adult paw print is more than 4" long and almost as wide! Wolves may be black, white, shades of gray and tan, or grizzled all over, and their winter coats can be a wooly 2 1/2" thick. Highly social animals, wolves live in packs of two to eight, cooperatively hunting big game such as deer, elk, caribou, moose and some small mammals. In general, breeding occurs only between the pack's leaders — the alpha pair — and the female bears an average of six pups to a litter. Pup-rearing is a pack effort, and social bonds and hunting skills are developed at a series of "rendezvous sites" up to a mile away from the den.

HISTORY

The gray wolf was once the most abundant large predator in North America, playing an important role in ecosystem health by hunting large mammals and keeping ungulate herds strong by eliminating the sick or weak. Before the arrival of European settlers, wolves ranged throughout most of the United States, Canada and Mexico. Nearly all of Idaho is believed to have supported gray wolves. By the early 20th century, man had almost exterminated the wolf from the lower 48 states.

DISTRIBUTION

Wolves concentrate naturally in areas that have large deer and elk populations, including parts of Montana, Wyoming and Idaho. Gray wolves in the lower 48 states now number about 2,600, with more than 2,000 of them estimated in Minnesota. Wolves were reintroduced to Central Idaho and Yellowstone National Park in 1995 and 1996. As of December 31, 1998, there were about ten breeding pairs of wolves in the Idaho Experimental Recovery Area, seven in the Yellowstone Experimental Recovery Area, and six in northwestern Montana.

WHAT HAS THREATENED THIS SPECIES?

Viewed as a threat to livestock, wolves were killed by settlers, fur traders and hunters. They also were subjected to government predator-control efforts. By the 1920s, only a few wolves roamed the lower 48 states. To this day, humans are the major threat to wolves.

WHAT IS BEING DONE TO HELP RECOVER THIS SPECIES?

Once hunted nearly to extinction, the Gray wolf's comeback has been attributed to scientific research, conservation and management programs, habitat protection, and wolf education efforts. A successful reintroduction program has been a major benefit to wolf recovery in the Rocky Mountains, as well as helped to balance the predator/prey relationship between wolves and prey species such as deer, elk and moose. Federal agencies, states, Native American Tribes, private organizations, and individuals have worked closely as partners to promote wolf recovery.

REFERENCES

USFWS. 1994, Final Environmental Impact Statement for Wolf Reintroduction to Yellowstone and Central Idaho summary.

USFWS. 1980/1987. Northern Rocky Mountain Wolf Recovery Plan.

